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# What is ecosystem restoration?

**Q. What is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Ecosystem Restoration Program?**

A. The USACE is comprised of approximately 30,000 civilian and military personnel, making it the world's largest public engineering, design and construction management agency. Although generally associated with flood risk management, the environmental mission is a main function of the organization.

Ecosystem restoration is the process of assisting in the recovery of ecosystems that have been degraded, damaged, or destroyed and focuses on establishing the ecological processes necessary to make terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems sustainable, resilient, and healthy under current and future conditions. The focus of the Corps ecosystem restoration program is on water-related ecosystem projects, including restoration of wetland, riparian and aquatic systems. Although the Corps sometimes does become involved in broader restoration projects, Corps policy is that there has to be a water nexus, as other federal agencies have missions and funding specifically for restoration of upland habitats – like the U.S. Forest Service. As such, the Corps focus is on wetlands, submerged aquatic vegetation, oyster reefs, riparian forest and wet prairie.

The USACE works to restore degraded ecosystems to a more natural condition through large-scale ecosystem restoration projects, such as the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration, Louisiana Coastal Area Ecosystem Restoration, Chesapeake Bay Oyster Recovery, Aransas National Wildlife Refuge Beneficial Use of Dredged Material (restoration of marsh critical to the endangered Whooping Crane), and Houston Ship Channel Beneficial Use of Dredged Material (marsh restoration in Galveston Bay), and by employing system-wide watershed approaches to problem solving and management for smaller ecosystem restoration projects.

**Q. What are the main focus areas concerning ecosystem restoration?**

A. The USACE environmental mission has two major focus areas: restoration and stewardship. The Corps' goal for the environmental mission is to restore ecosystem structure and processes, manage the nation's land and water resources in a sustainable manner and support cleanup and protection activities in an efficient and effective manner. The USACE Galveston District manages numerous environmental programs that range from establishing

and/or reestablishing wetlands that help the survival of endangered species to seagrass planting and protection, and riparian forest restoration.

**Q. Why is ecosystem restoration necessary?**

A. USACE supports ecosystem sustainability as a mission focus for all project development and land management decisions. This focus reflects protection of our natural resources under numerous federal laws, including the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA), Clean Water Act, Coastal Zone Management Act, Endangered Species Act, Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act, and Migratory Bird Conservation Act.

**Q. What are the Corps' Environmental Operating Principles?**

A. In 2002, the USACE adopted its seven Environmental Operating Principles, or green ethics, which continue to guide the USACE Galveston District's environmental and sustainability work. The Environmental Operating Principles doctrine is as follows:

1. Strive to achieve environmental sustainability
2. Recognize the interdependence of life and the physical environment
3. Seek balance and synergy among human development activities and natural systems
4. Continue to accept corporate responsibility and accountability under the law
5. Seek ways and means to assess and mitigate cumulative impacts to the environment
6. Build and share an integrated scientific, economic, and social knowledge base
7. Respect the views of individuals and groups interested in Corps activities

**Q. What are some current ecosystem restoration projects within the USACE Galveston District?**

A. The USACE Galveston District has a number of projects all along the Texas coast that use dredged material from its maintenance dredging program beneficially to create marsh, restore seagrass, and provide bird rookeries, including projects in Galveston Bay, Matagorda Bay, Corpus Christi Bay, the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, and the Laguna Madre. The Corps will cost-share an oyster reef restoration in Matagorda Bay with The Nature Conservancy in the near future, and we have initiated a comprehensive study of the upper Texas coast from Sabine to Galveston in collaboration with the Texas General Land Office that will look for opportunities for large-scale ecosystem restoration projects to protect not only habitats, but the Texas coast from storm surge and erosion.

The USACE Galveston District's Regulatory Branch works to ensure no net loss of wetlands while issuing about 2,500 permits a year.

**Q. Who are the USACE Galveston District's major partners?**

A. USACE works in partnership with other federal and state agencies, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions to find innovative solutions to challenges that affect everyone – sustainability, endangered species, and ecosystem restoration. Some of the district's most robust partners include Harris County Flood Control District, Sabine Neches Navigation District, Port of Houston Authority, Port Freeport, Port of Corpus Christi Authority, Port of Brownsville, and The Nature Conservancy.

**Q. How can I find out more about environmental restoration initiatives?**

A. For more information visit the USACE Galveston District's website at www.swg.usace.army.mil (Environmental Section http://bit.ly/MIbty2). Find us on Facebook, www.facebook.com/GalvestonDistrict, or follow us on Twitter, www.twitter.com/USACEgalveston.

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